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(71) Applicant(s)  
**Beynul Limited**  
  
(Incorporated in the United Kingdom)  
  
Merchant's Quay, Dublin 8, Ireland

(72) Inventor(s)  
**Paul O'Dea**  
**Gerry English**  
**Gerry Kelly**

(74) Agent and/or Address for Service  
**Marks & Clerk**  
57-60 Lincoln's Inn Fields, LONDON, WC2A 3LS,  
United Kingdom

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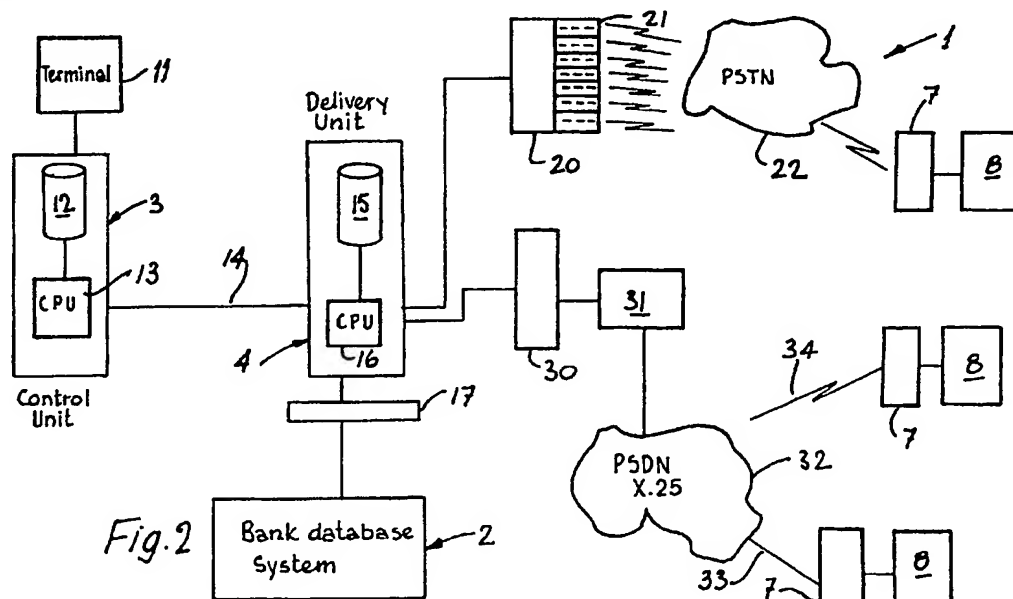
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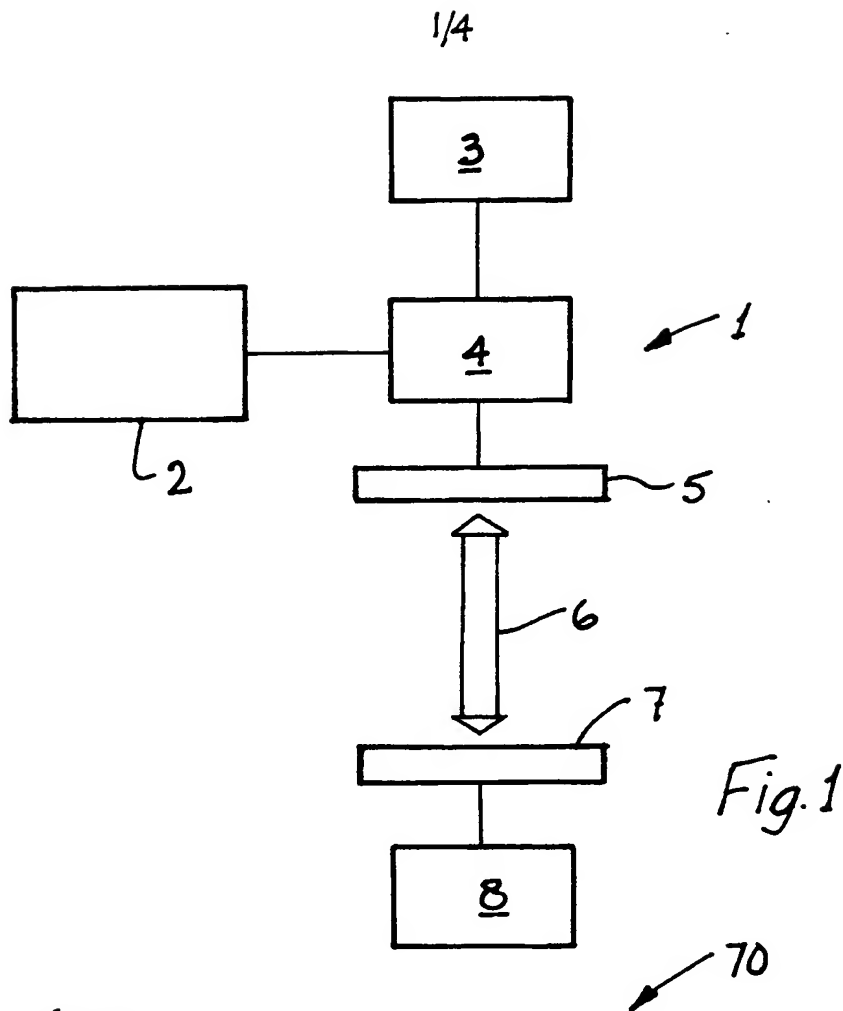
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(54) Processing financial transactions.

(57) An apparatus for processing financial transactions includes a delivery unit (4) which communicates with a bank financial system (2) and with many remote client workstations (8). The apparatus (1) also includes a control unit (3). The delivery and control units each include a central message router which routes all signals to various server devices which may be processors, communication devices, or auxiliary devices. The auxiliary devices operate in the background independently of signals from the remote workstations to monitor transactions.



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Server request servers activated	Accounts	MTS	Treasury	E-mail	Admin.
Accounts	✓				✓
MTS		✓			✓
Treasury	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
E-mail	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Admin.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Fig. 5

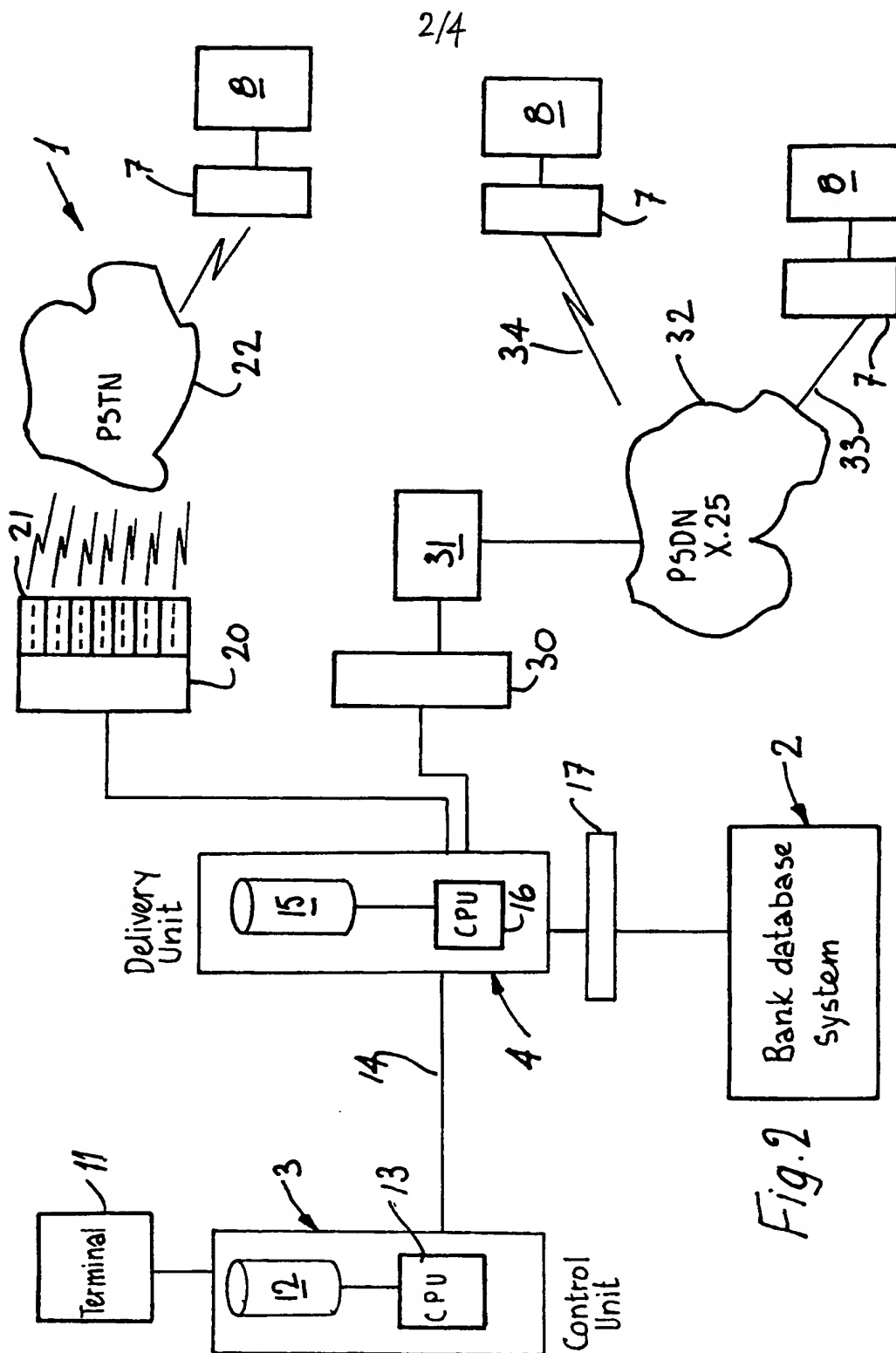


Fig. 2

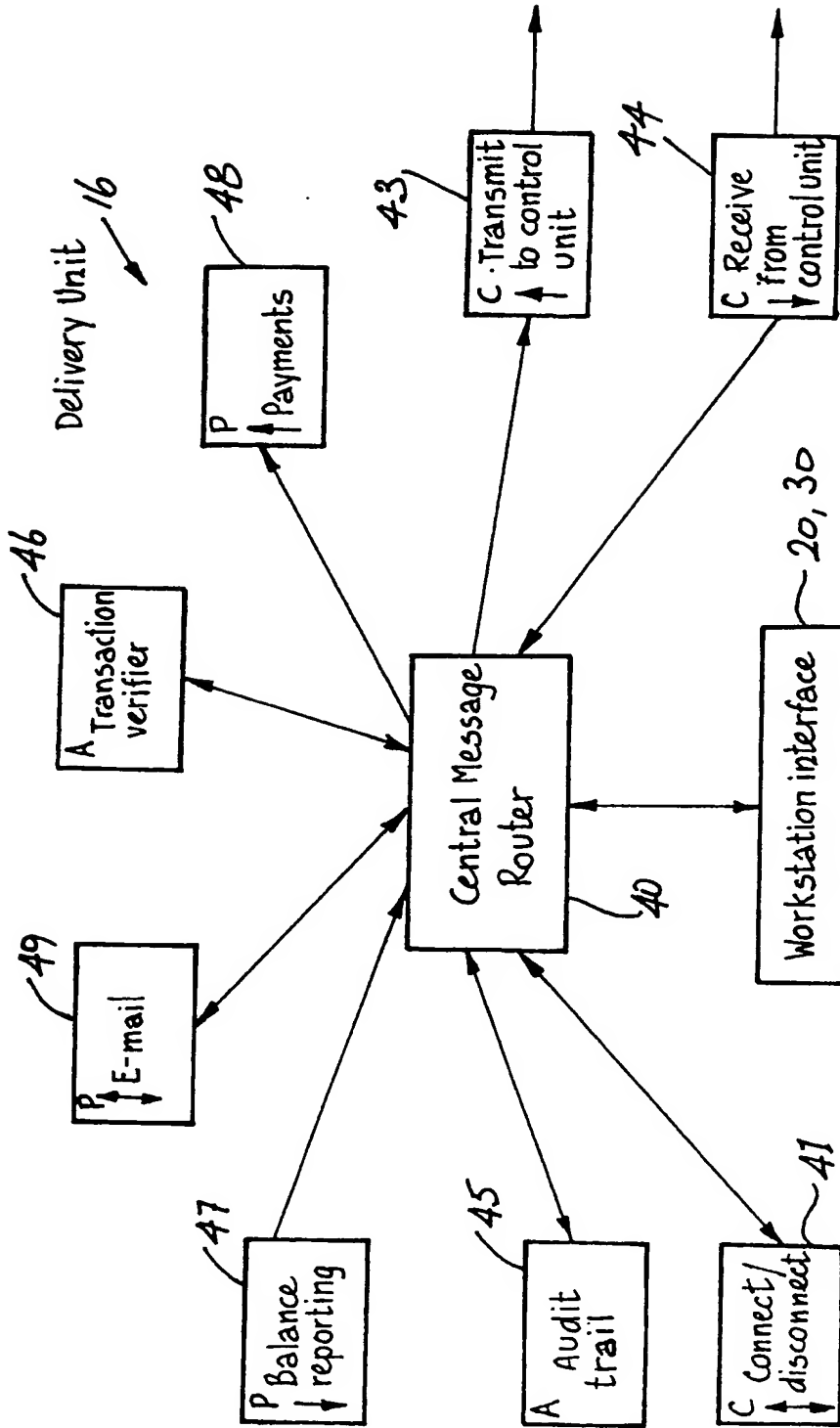


Fig. 3

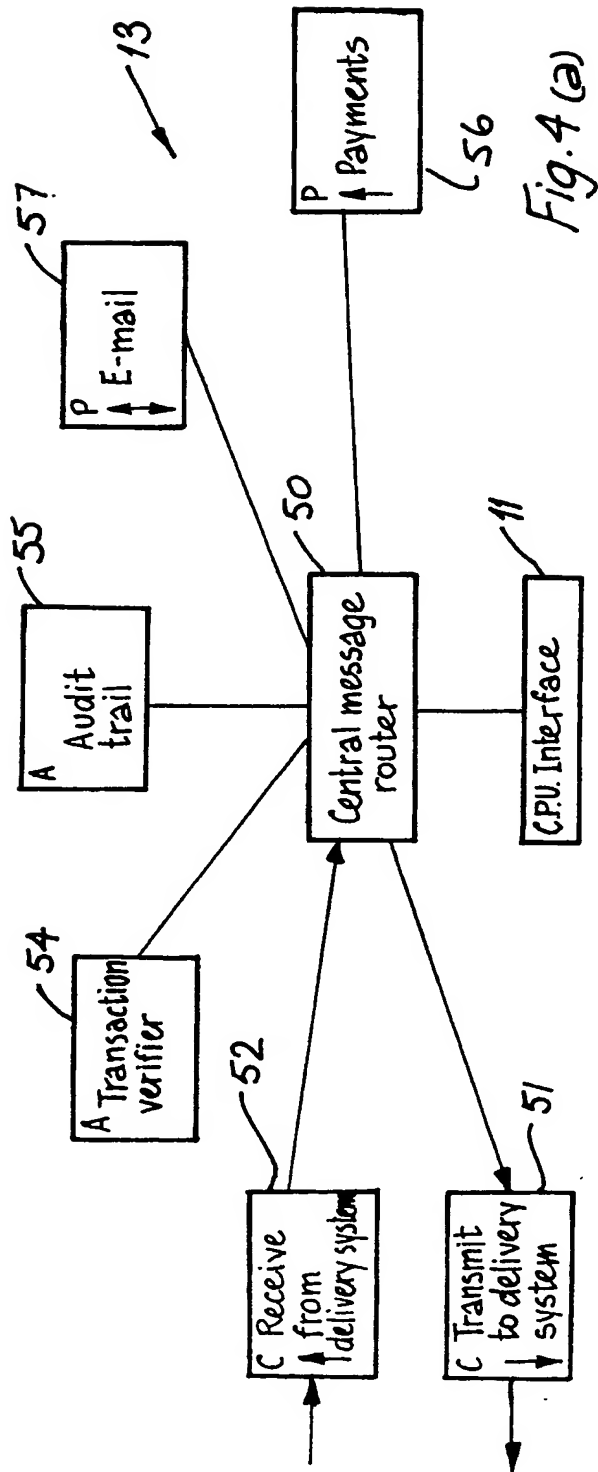


Fig. 4(a)

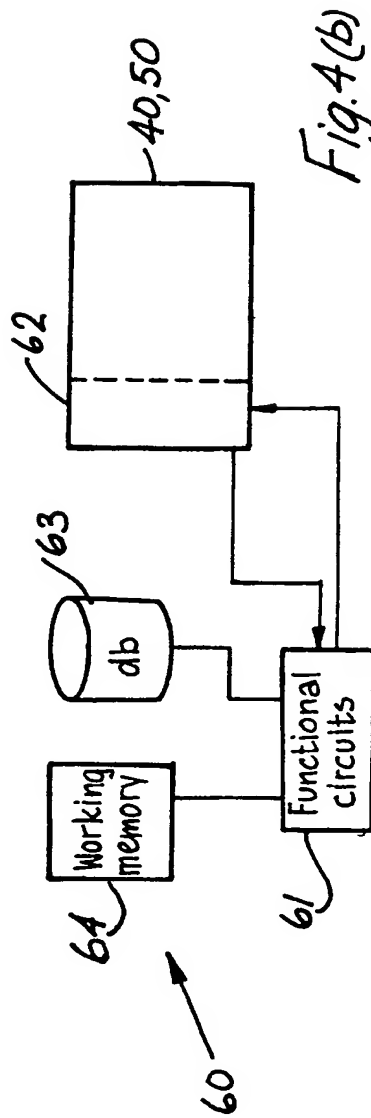


Fig. 4(b)

"Apparatus for processing financial transactions"

5 The invention relates to an apparatus for processing financial transactions where the transactions are initiated by remote users. In this specification, the term "transaction" means not only what is generally referred to as a transaction such as payment of a bill or lodgement of money to an account, but also the dissemination of information such as exchange rates and stock market prices.

10 British patent specification no. GB-B-2180380 (Merrill Lynch) describes an apparatus for automated securities trading in which a central processing unit communicates with various database systems and terminals for processing transactions. European patent specification no. EP-B1-72183 (NCR Canada) describes a system for processing  
15 financial transactions in which various processes are carried out for different stages such as document processing and teller verification. In addition, there are other prior art documents including EP-B1-14312 (IBM), EP-A2-527639 (US Order), WO 91/09370 (Online Resources)  
20 and WO93/02422 (Checkfree Corp.) which relate to processes carried out for the implementation of financial transactions. In general, the prior art apparatus' relate primarily to the particular processes which are carried out. For example, in GB-B-2180380, the primary features  
25 of the apparatus are the manner in which the central processing units process the input signals. Thus, it can be said that much work has been carried out in the area of improving the manner in which the processing takes place for the financial transactions.

30 The invention is not specifically directed to the particular processes, but to an apparatus which can carry out different financial transaction processes whereby

communication between the processors and interaction of the processors and the various terminals is improved in such a way as to provide a short response time, and for a small chance of data corruption occurring.

- 5 Another object of the invention is to provide improved versatility in such an apparatus so that additional processes may be added with relatively simple interfacing and integrated operations.

- 10 A still further object is to provide for minimisation of telecommunication costs for remote users.

According to the invention there is provided a transaction processing apparatus:-

a control unit;

- 15 a delivery unit connected to the control unit and comprising an interface for connection to a financial database system; and

a set of remote client workstations, each comprising an interface for remote two-way communication with the delivery unit,

- 20 wherein the control unit and the delivery unit each comprise a central message router connected to a plurality of server devices, the server devices in each unit comprising:-

at least two processor server devices, including:-

- 25 at least one upload processor constructed for reception of data signals routed from the associated central message router, and for

transmitting them to a destination indicated by an identifier embedded in the signals; and

5           at least one download processor constructed for retrieval of data according to a request signal routed from the associated central message router and for transmitting the data to the central message router with an embedded destination identifier of the workstation which transmitted the request signal;

10           at least one communication device constructed for transfer of data; and

at least one auxiliary device for automatic operation independently of the workstation signals, including:-

15           at least one verifier device constructed to monitor data flow in the associated central message router and for verifying the data,

wherein each server device has an associated address and comprises activation means for activation on recognition of the address;

20           wherein the control unit includes a user database of financial data updated regularly via the delivery unit, and being connected to the delivery unit central message router for said communication; and

25           wherein each client workstation includes addresses for the upload and download processor server devices, and control means for automatically inserting a relevant address in every signal transmitted to the delivery unit.



Preferably, each client workstation includes a stored cross-reference table of primary, user-requested addresses, and subsidiary addresses, and the control means comprises means for automatically inserting the related subsidiary addresses with each primary address transmitted to the delivery unit without directing display of a user indication of this activity.

In one embodiment, a transaction verifier server device comprises an audit trail processor arranged to automatically write a transaction summary to a transaction database by monitoring signals at the associated central message router.

The invention will be more clearly understood from the following description of some preferred embodiments thereof, given by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Fig. 1 is an overview block diagram showing an apparatus of the invention;

Fig. 2 is a more detailed diagram showing the apparatus;

Fig. 3 is a diagram showing the construction of a delivery unit of the apparatus;

Fig. 4(a) is a block diagram showing construction of a control unit of the apparatus and Fig. 4(b) is a diagram showing construction of a typical server device; and

Fig. 5 is a table showing the manner in which a remote user work station of the apparatus communicates with

the delivery unit for communication of sample sets of data.

Referring to the drawings, and initially to Fig. 1, an apparatus 1 of the invention for processing financial transactions is shown. The apparatus 1 is connected to a large bank database system 2. The bank database system 2 stores a very large amount of data including account details for up to approximately 3000 to 4000 customers and also a large amount of other treasury data such as stock exchange information, commodity prices, deposit rates and other data. The system 2 does not form part of the invention and it is only necessary to bear in mind that it stores a large amount of data and that this data is kept up to date on a real-time basis.

The apparatus 1 comprises a control unit 3 which contains various control processors and storage devices. The control unit 3 is connected to a delivery unit 4, in turn connected to interface devices 5. A bi-directional, or two-way remote communications link 6 is illustrated between the interfaces 5 and interfaces 7 for remote client workstations 8. The control unit 3 and the delivery unit 4 are located in a financial institution such as a bank branch physically close to the database system 2. However, it is envisaged that they may be some distance apart and connected by leased lines. The client workstations 8 are at the clients' premises and may be spread over a wide geographical area.

Referring now to Fig. 2, the apparatus 1 is shown in more detail. The control unit 3 comprises a set of fixed disks 12 and a central processing unit (CPU) 13. The CPU 13 retrieves programs from the disks 12 and stores them in memory (not shown) so that various processes may be carried out. These processes may be initiated by the user

at a CPU terminal 11. The disks 12 store a database of financial data which is updated regularly.

The control unit 3 is connected by a bi-directional link 14 to the delivery unit 4. The delivery unit 4 comprises fixed disks 15 connected to a CPU 16. The CPU may retrieve different programs from the disks 15 for the carrying out of various processes. It is envisaged, however, that either of the CPUs 13 or 16 may be replaced by a set of separate processors each dedicated to a particular process. Whether the processes are implemented primarily in software or primarily in hardware is not relevant to the invention.

The CPU 16 is connected to an interface 17 which links it with the bank database system 2.

The delivery unit 4 is connected to two sets of sub-components of the interface 5. One sub-component comprises an interface 20 connected to a modem rack 21 for communication in a public service telephone network (PSTN) 22 with modems 7 for the client workstations 8. The other sub-component of the interface 5 is an interface 30 connected to an X25 routing device 31 for communication of the CPU 16 with the client workstation modems 7 via a public service data network (PSDN) 32. As shown, the client workstation modem 7 may communicate via a leased line 33, or via a dial-up connection 34.

Both the CPU 13 and the CPU 16 are constructed to carry out many different processes, the processes being primarily software driven. As stated above, however, these processes may alternatively be implemented in hardware. An important aspect of the invention is the manner in which the various processes are interlinked. This is illustrated in Fig. 3 for the delivery unit 4, and

in Fig. 4 for the control unit 3. As shown in Fig. 3, the CPU 16 includes a central message router 40 which is connected to the interfaces 20 and 30. The central message router 40 is connected to a number of processes, each being referred to as a server device. The server devices fall into three main categories as follows:-

- A. a processor for handling of data and/or request or instruction signals;
- B. a transfer or communication device, whose only function is the routing of information; and
- C. an auxiliary device for the carrying out of off-line processes not directly related to transaction processing.

In the diagram, processors are indicated by the letter P, communication devices by the letter C, and auxiliary devices by the letter A. In addition, upwardly-directed arrows indicate data flow into the delivery unit 4 (upload processor) whereas downwardly-directed arrows indicate data flow out of the delivery unit 4 (download processor).

The CPU 16 of the delivery unit 4 has connect/disconnect transmit and receive server devices 41, 43 and 44, respectively. The auxiliary devices include an audit trail device 45 and a transaction verifier 46. The processor devices include a balance reporting device 47, a payments device 48 and an electronic mail device 49.

Referring specifically to Fig. 4(a), the central message router 50 is connected to transmit and receive communication devices 51 and 52, respectively. The devices 51 and 52 in the CPU 13 communicate with the devices 43 and 44 in the CPU 16. The central message

router 50 is also connected to transaction verifier and audit trail auxiliary devices 54 and 55. The processor devices include a payments device 56 and an electronic mail device 57.

5 Referring specifically to Fig. 4b, construction of a typical server device indicated generally by the reference numeral 60 is illustrated. The server device 60 comprises a set of functional circuits 61 connected to a database 63 and to a working memory 64. The functional circuits 61  
10 are also connected to a buffer memory 62 in the router 40 or 50. The buffer memory 62 is used for the passing of data or instruction signals between the server devices.

In operation, as stated previously, the bank database system 2 is kept up to date in real-time with financial  
15 information. The delivery unit 4 communicates with the system 2 and updates a large database on the fixed disk drives 15. This database stores selected data for clients to minimise the amount of traffic required between the interface 17 and the system 2. There is also a large  
20 amount of data stored on the database on the fixed disk drives 12 of the control unit 3. However, in addition there are many software programs stored on the disks 12 which govern operation of the apparatus 1 and control such things as security for accessing bank client workstations.  
25 In this respect, it is advantageous that the client workstations do not directly access the control unit 3 as the opportunity for "hacking" is minimised.

Each client workstation 8 may transmit a signal via the relevant communication circuits to the central message  
30 router 40 of the delivery unit 4. These signals include embedded addresses for the relevant server devices. The central message router 40 recognises these addresses and re-transmits the signals to the relevant server devices.

However, the client work stations 8 do not store addresses for the auxiliary or the communications server devices - only the processor devices. The auxiliary devices are generally not addressed by the central message router, while the router does use the communication devices 41, 43 and 44 for communication with the router 50 and the interfaces 20 and 30.

The client workstation 8 (which is a microcomputer) is programmed to automatically insert the relevant server device address in the signal which is transmitted to the router 40. Such a signal may be a request for information regarding a bank balance, in which case the device 47 is addressed. If electronic mail is required, the device 49 is addressed, whereas if the user wishes to make a transaction such as payment to an account, the device 48 is used. As is clear from the drawings, for some processes there are server devices in both the control unit 3 and the delivery unit 4. In this way, the processing work is distributed between the two units and one processor may be assigned to one group of clients, whereas the other may be assigned to a different group. The server devices are programmed to recognise their addresses and automatically become activated.

An important aspect of the invention is that the client workstations are constructed to automatically insert the address for the relevant server device when transmitting a signal as a primary address. However, in addition, each client workstation refers to a cross reference table such as that indicated by the numeral 70 in Fig. 5. According to the table 70, the client workstation 8 when inserting the address for the relevant server device will also insert subsidiary addresses for other server devices in default mode "transparently" to the client. Thus, if the client wishes to access a server device for accounts, the

client workstation automatically inserts a primary address, namely that for an accounts server device, and also subsidiary addresses for MTS (monetary transaction services), treasury, electronic mail and administration server devices. As will be apparent, the server devices as illustrated in the table 70 are not the same as those shown in the previous drawings. The nature of the processes carried out by the server devices are not important. For example, a client workstation may cause the downloading of balance statements for a client, which is what the client requested. However, in addition, the client workstation also receives electronic mail and treasury data and also various administration data unbeknownst to the client. This data is stored on disk in the client workstation and may be retrieved at any time. This provides for a very fast response time to the client as it is not necessary to make a remote connection. It will thus be appreciated that when each communication session is established, a large amount of data is downloaded, and this minimises the number of connections which are required. By minimising the number of connections which are made, and minimising the amount of traffic, the chances of data corruption occurring are minimised, and relatively small telecommunication charges will arise for the clients.

While the processor and communication server devices are operating according to instructions from the client workstations and the router 40, the auxiliary server devices operate in the background in automatic mode without reference to any other device. The audit trail device 45 monitors all transactions which pass through the relevant central message router and logs them to a database. At periodic intervals this data is archived to tapes. Accordingly, a comprehensive audit trail is provided for all of the transactions which are processed

by the apparatus 1. In addition, the transaction verifier  
46 acts as a "watchdog" to monitor transactions to ensure  
that data transmitted from clients and to clients does not  
exceed tolerance values and it also monitors accesses to  
5 data to check for security reasons.

An important aspect of the invention is the manner in  
which all signals, both data and instructions, are  
transmitted through a central message router in each of  
the two units. This allows audit trail and transaction  
10 verification operations to be carried out in a simple  
manner whereby all data may be monitored quite easily. It  
also allows maximum versatility in the manner in which  
various devices may be interconnected. This is very  
important from the commercial perspective as it allows  
15 additional processes to be easily added in a modular  
"bolt-on" fashion. Additionally client workstations may  
receive a large amount of data for each communication  
session. Important aspects of the invention are the  
manner in which the various devices are interconnected,  
20 and not the actual processes which are carried out.

The invention is not limited to the embodiments  
hereinbefore described. But may be varied in construction  
and detail.



CLAIMS

1. A transaction processing apparatus comprising:-

a control unit;

5 a delivery unit connected to the control unit and comprising an interface for connection to a financial database system; and

a set of remote client workstations, each comprising an interface for remote two-way communication with the delivery unit,

10 wherein the control unit and the delivery unit each comprise a central message router connected to a plurality of server devices, the server devices in each unit comprising:-

at least two processor server devices, including:-

15 at least one upload processor constructed for reception of data signals routed from the associated central message router, and for transmitting them to a destination indicated by an identifier embedded in the signals; and

20 at least one download processor constructed for retrieval of data according to a request signal routed from the associated central message router and for transmitting the data to the central message router with an embedded destination  
25 identifier of the workstation which transmitted the request signal;

at least one communication device constructed for transfer of data; and

at least one auxiliary device for automatic operation independently of the workstation signals, including:-

- 5           at least one verifier device constructed to monitor data flow in the associated central message router and for verifying the data,

          wherein each server device has an associated address and comprises activation means for activation on  
10           recognition of the address;

          wherein the control unit includes a user database of financial data updated regularly via the delivery unit, and being connected to the delivery unit central message router for said communication; and

- 15           wherein each client workstation includes addresses for the upload and download processor server devices, and control means for automatically inserting a relevant address in every signal transmitted to the delivery unit.

- 20           2. An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein each client workstation includes a stored cross-reference table of primary, user-requested addresses, and subsidiary addresses, and the control means comprises means for automatically inserting the related subsidiary  
25           addresses with each primary address transmitted to the delivery unit without directing display of a user indication of this activity.

3. An apparatus as claimed in claims 1 or 2, wherein a transaction verifier server device comprises an audit

trail processor arranged to automatically write a transaction summary to a transaction database by monitoring signals at the associated central message router.

- 5     4. An apparatus substantially as hereinbefore described, with reference to, and as illustrated in, the accompanying drawings.